




A CURBSIDE CHAT  
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**STRONG  
TOWNS**



SUPPORT A MODEL OF  
DEVELOPMENT THAT ALLOWS  
AMERICA'S CITIES, TOWNS AND  
NEIGHBORHOODS TO BECOME  
FINANCIALLY STRONG AND  
RESILIENT.

**STRONG  
TOWNS**

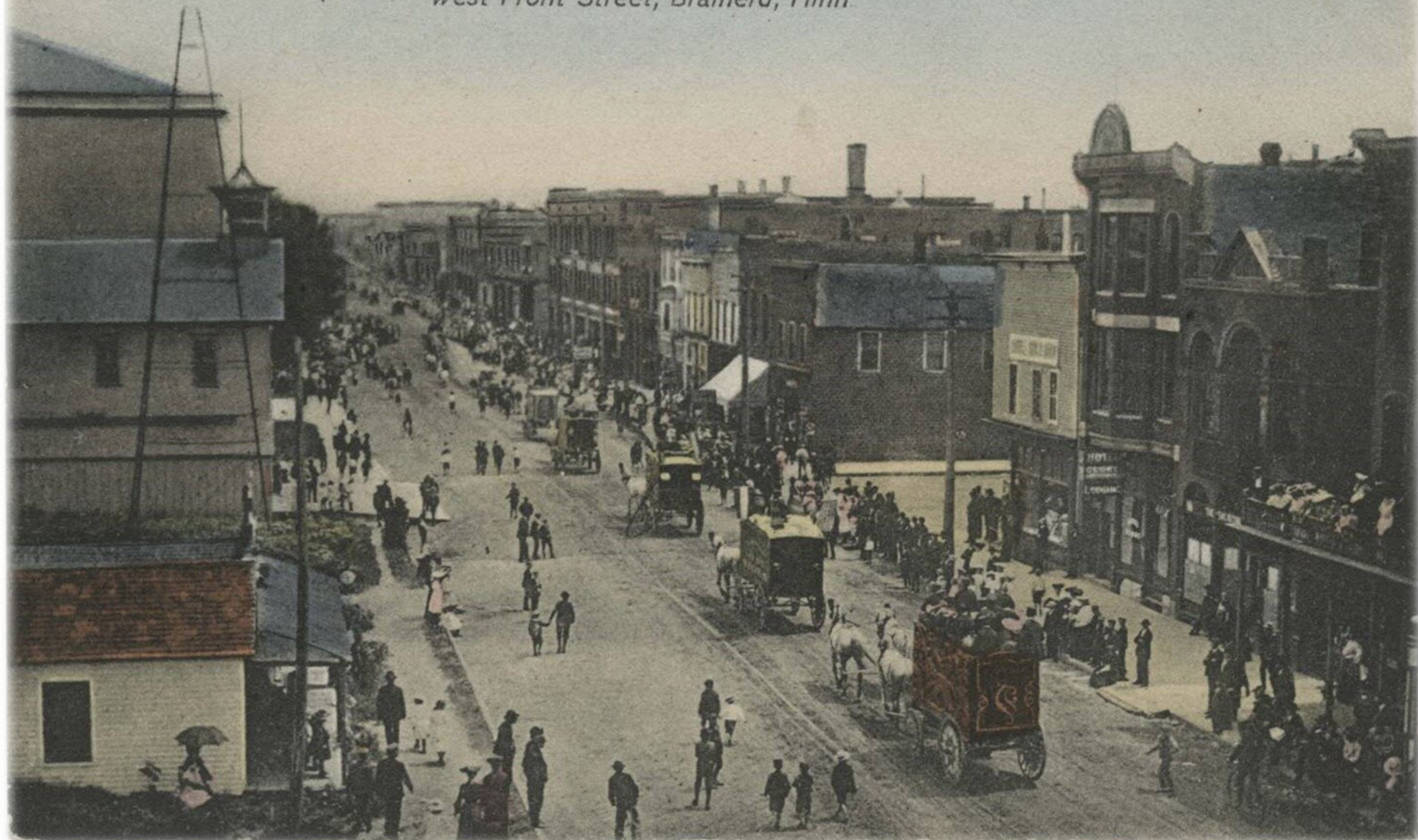


2020





*West Front Street, Brainerd, Minn.*





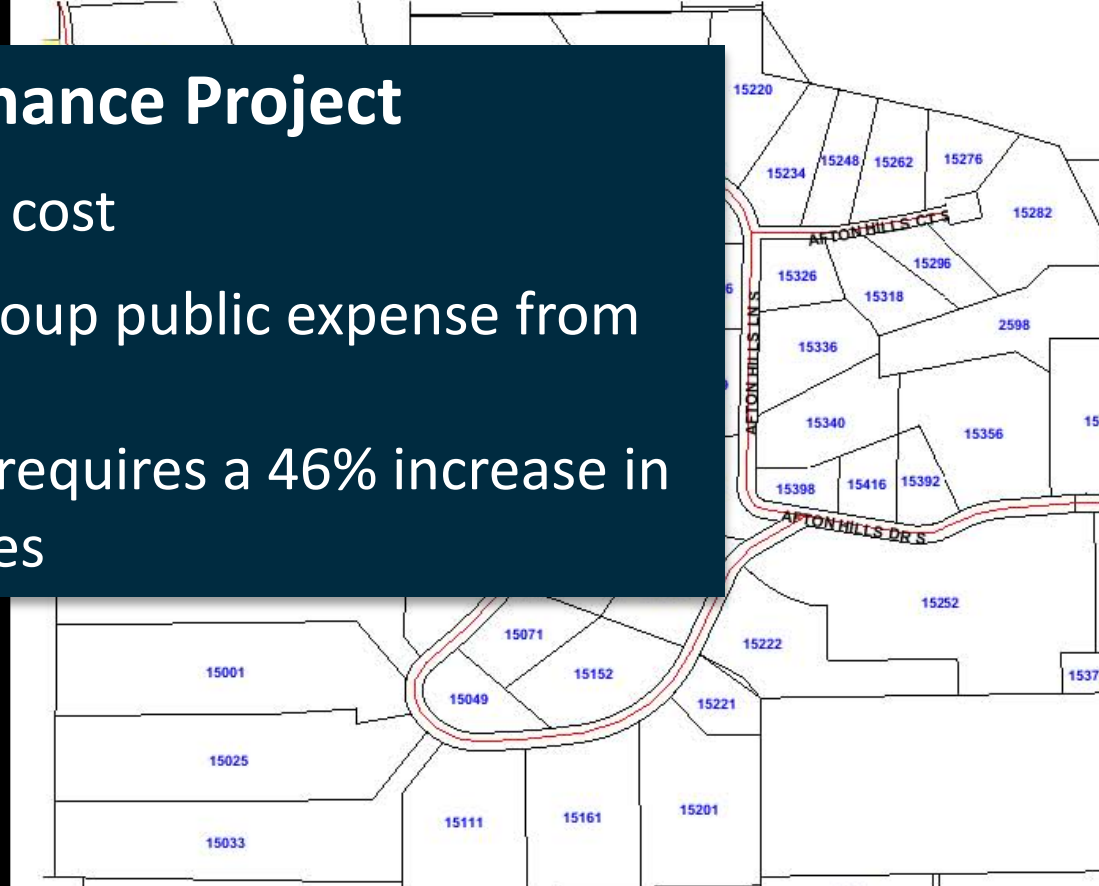




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## Road Maintenance Project

- \$354,000 total cost
- 79 years to recoup public expense from tax base
- To break even requires a 46% increase in property tax rates

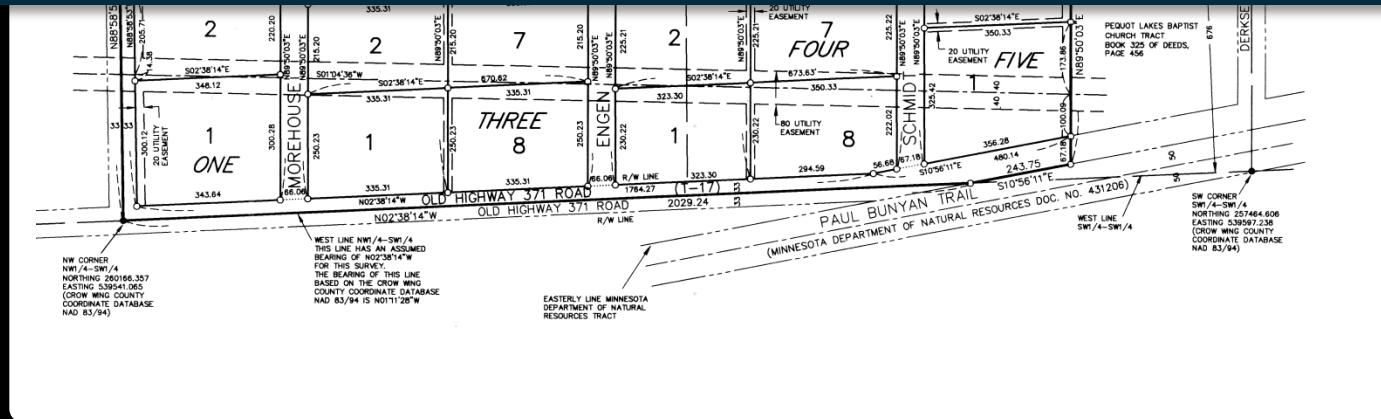


# Local Road Rehabilitation



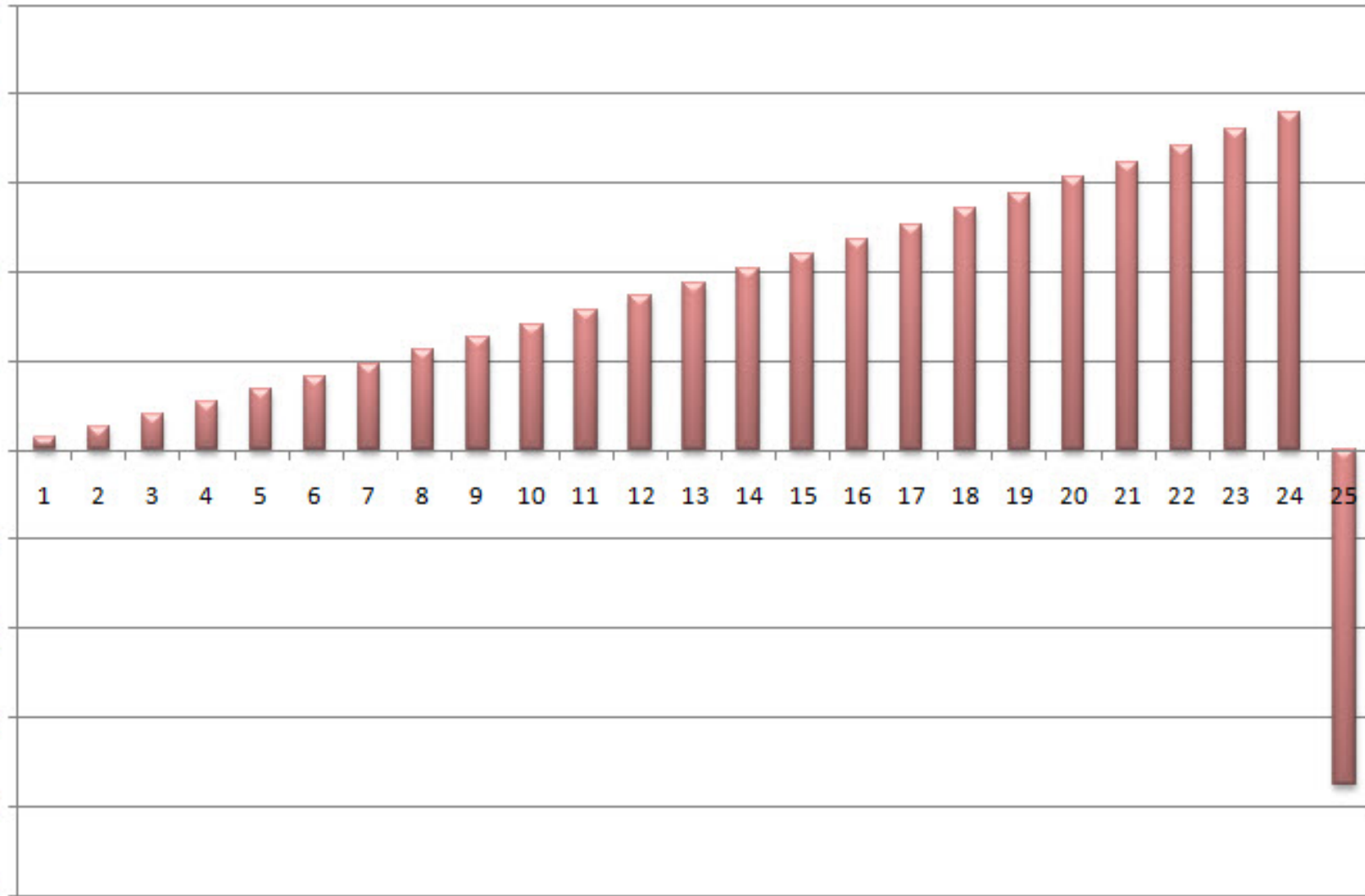
## Industrial Park Development

- \$2.1 million inflation-adjusted total cost
- \$6.6 million in improvements induced
- Payback from current conditions happens in 29 years if all revenue devoted only to debt



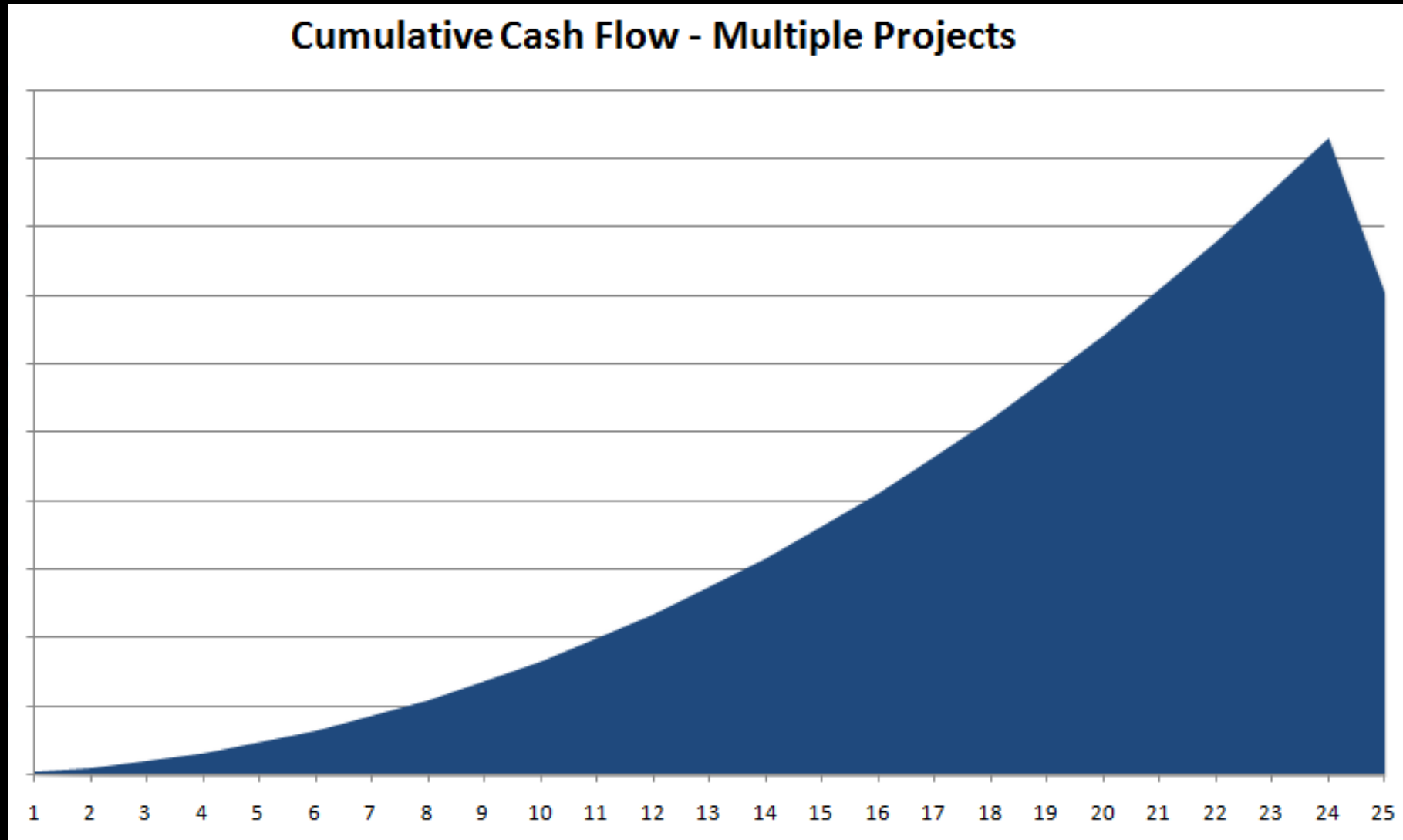
# Industrial Development

Cumulative Cash Flow - One Life Cycle



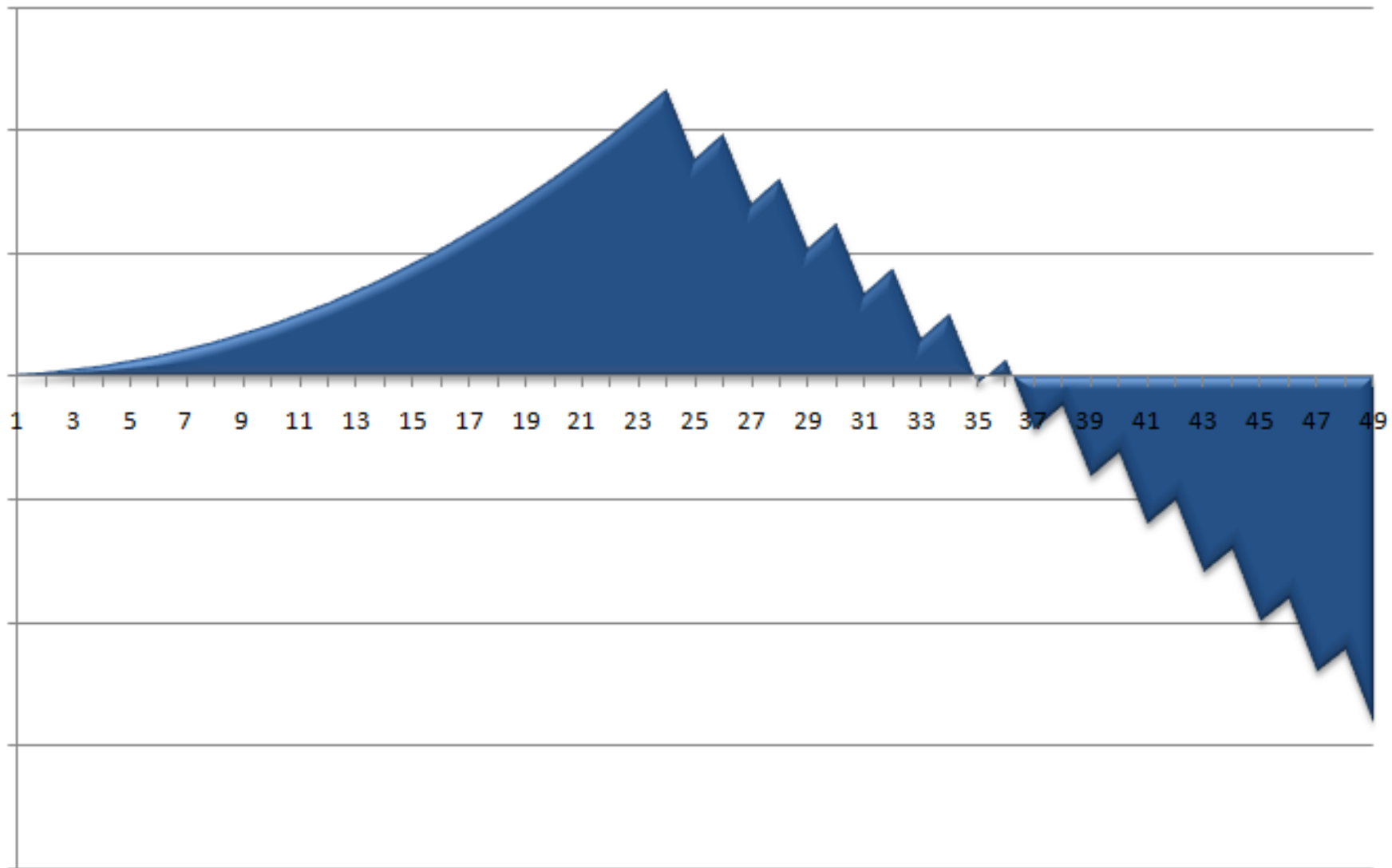
Growth Ponzi Scheme





Growth Ponzi Scheme

Cumulative Cash Flow - Two Life Cycles



Growth Ponzi Scheme



## Serious implications for the future

The “Mechanisms of Growth” we have become accustomed to are waning.

Local governments are going to be forced to absorb the local costs of the current development pattern.

This can't be done in the current pattern of development without **large tax increases** and/or **large cuts in services**.

So what do we do?







Build it and they will come....



Build it and they will come....





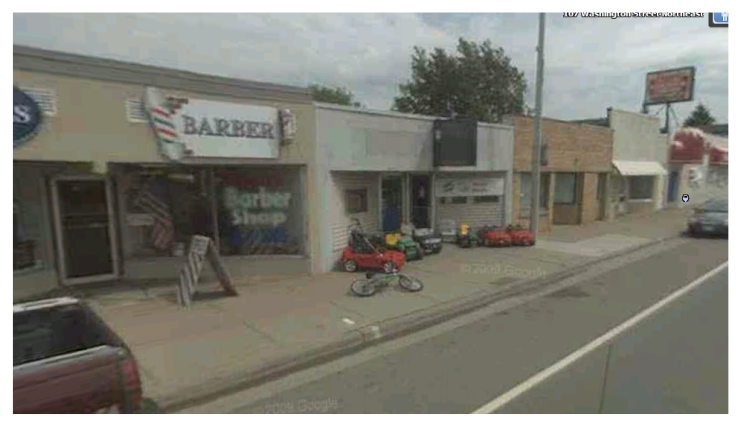


# High Return Investments









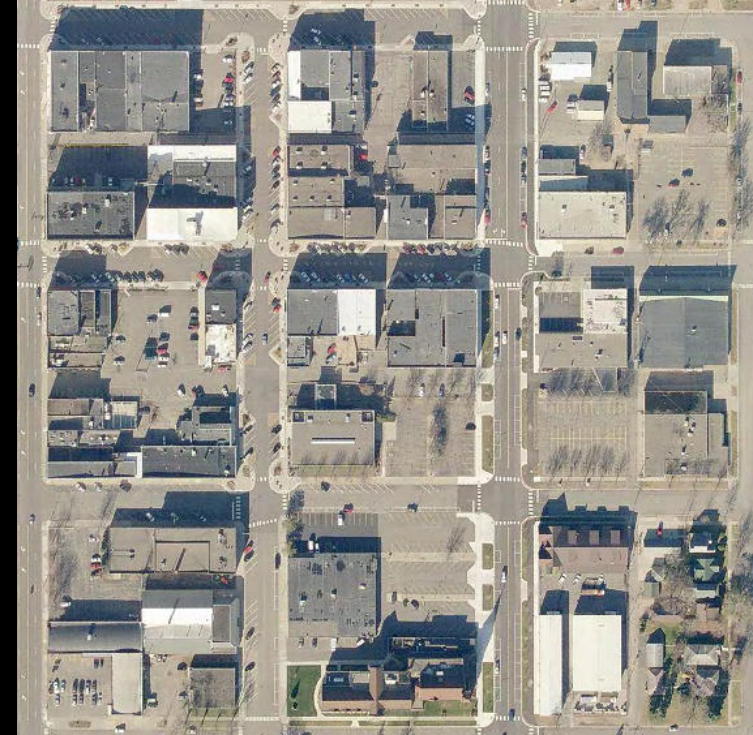
\$1,104,500

\$618,500





**Auto Oriented \$0.6  
million/acre**



**Traditional Pattern \$1.1  
million/acre**

**High Return Investments**





**Kmart**  
\$384,849/acre



**Walmart**  
\$967,552/acre

**String & Splinter Club**  
\$5,028,450/acre



**203 N. Main St.**  
\$3,452,560/acre



## Population

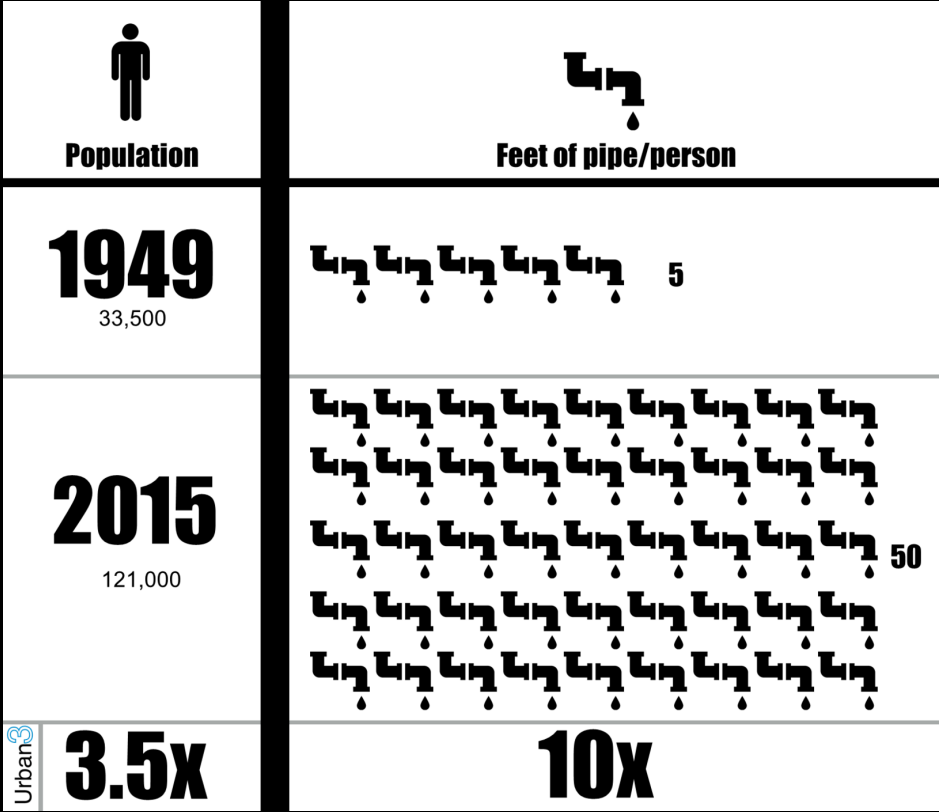
**1949**  
33,500




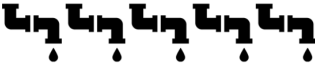

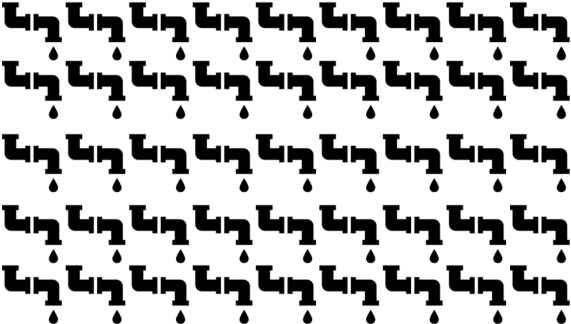
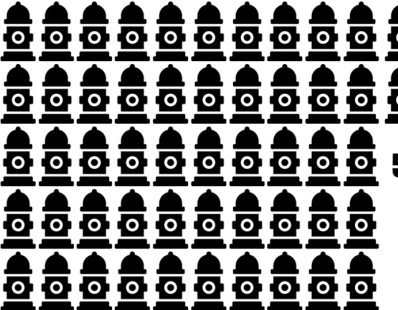

**2015**  
121,000

Urban

**3.5x**





 <b>Population</b>	 <b>Feet of pipe/person</b>	 <b>Fire Hydrants/1,000 people</b>
<b>1949</b> 33,500	 5	<small>Source: Sanborn Maps and LCG Records</small>  2.4
<b>2015</b> 121,000	 50	 51.3
 <b>3.5x</b>	<b>10x</b>	<b>21.4x</b>

Population



3.5x

Feet of pipe/person



10x

Fire Hydrants/1,000 people



21.4x

## Your Median Household income



1950

\$27,700



2015

\$45,000

1.6x

Source: US Census Bureau and Stanford University adjusted to 2015 net present value.

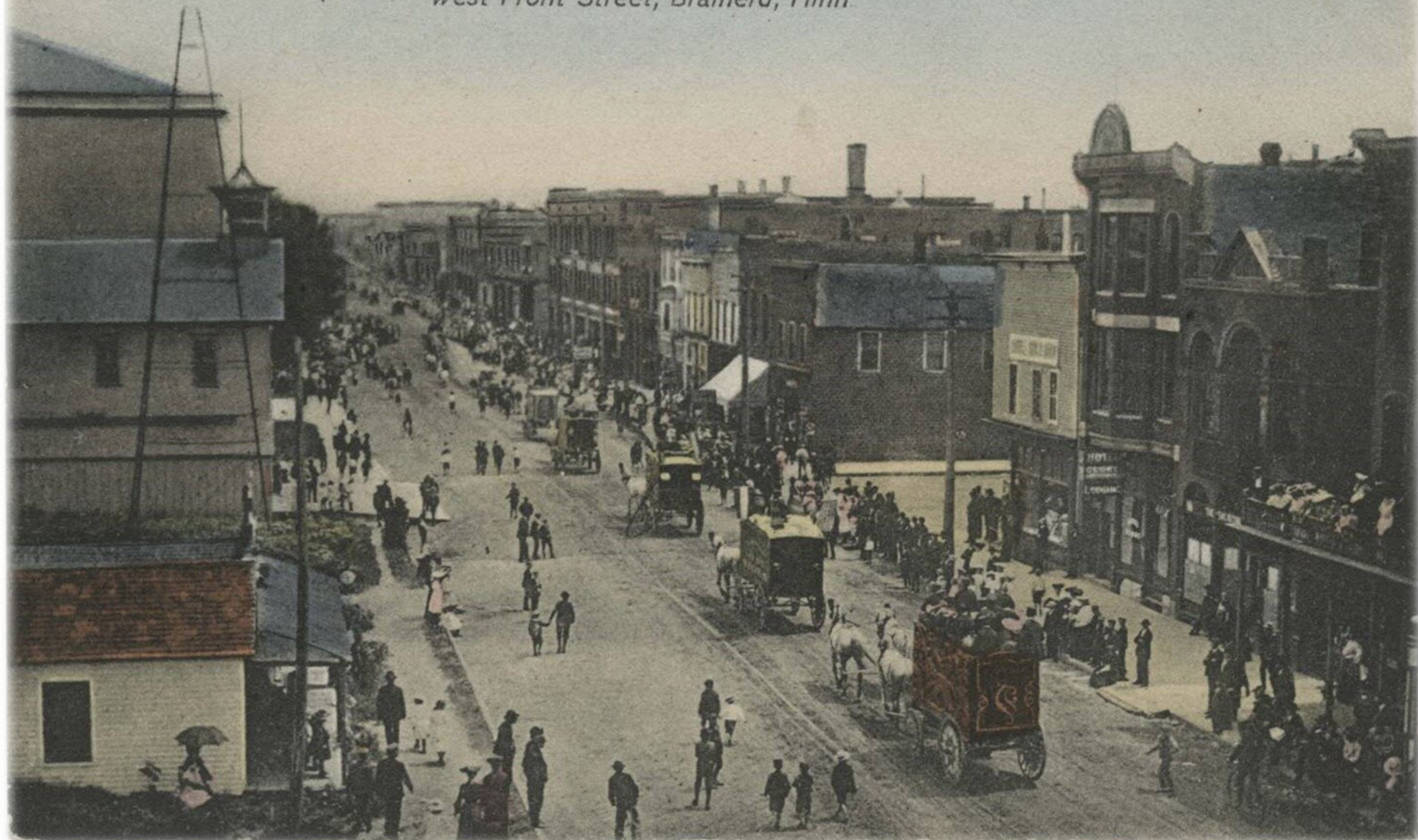








*West Front Street, Brainerd, Minn.*







# Public investment process for a Strong Town



Humbly observe where people in the community struggle.



Ask the question: What is the next smallest thing we can do right now to address that struggle?

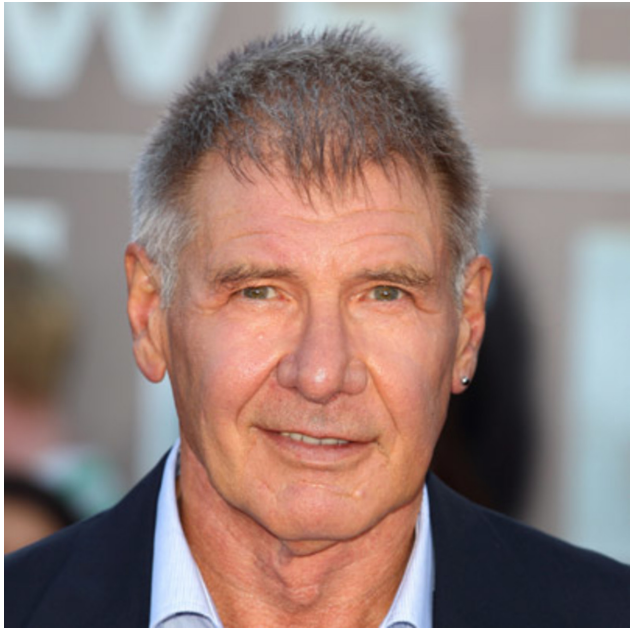


Do that thing. Do it right now.



Repeat.





## Harrison, Hobbits & How-To's

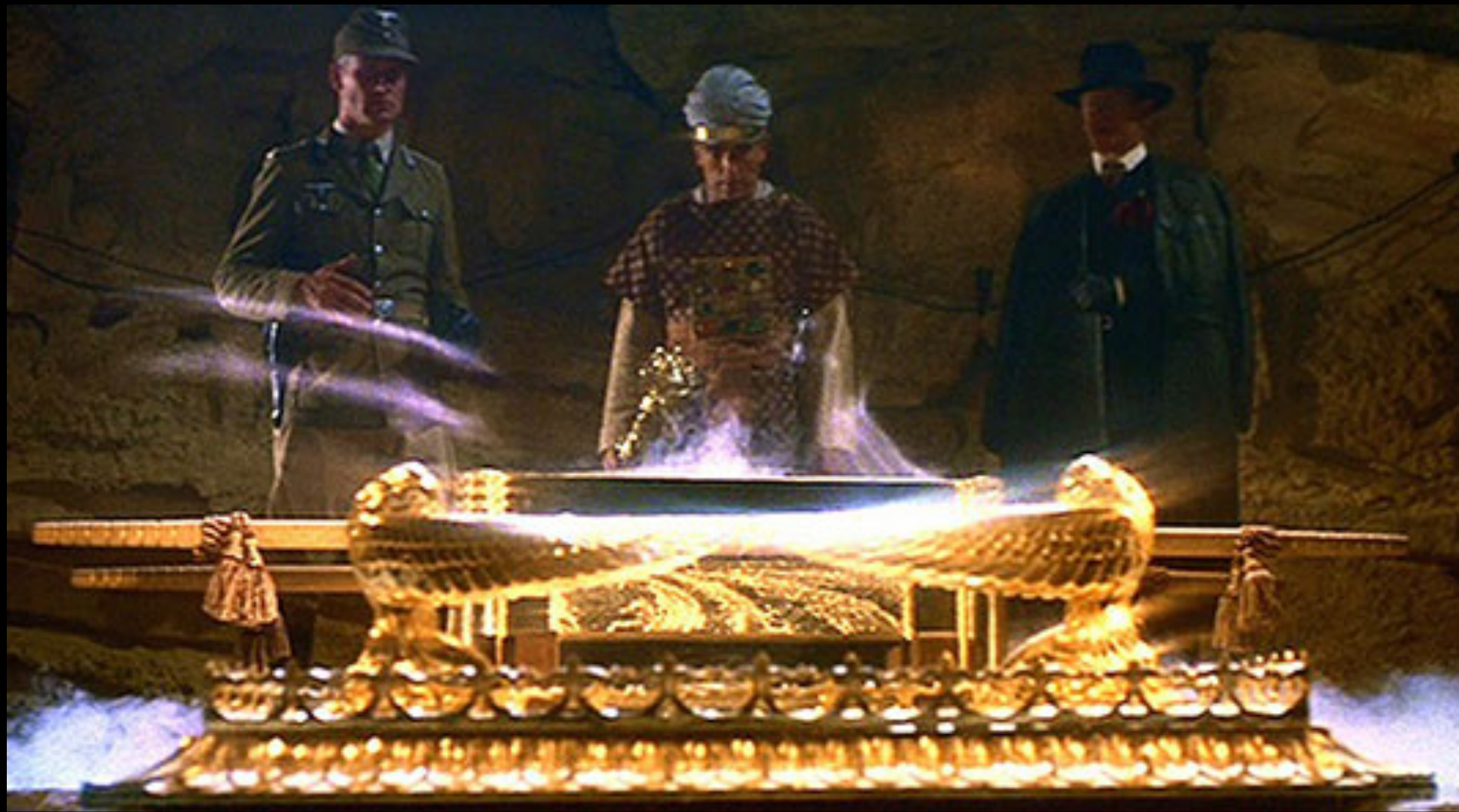


How Plans Go Wrong





Sit on a shelf



Uh oh...



Grand plans  
vs.  
Humble steps







# Public investment process for a Strong Town



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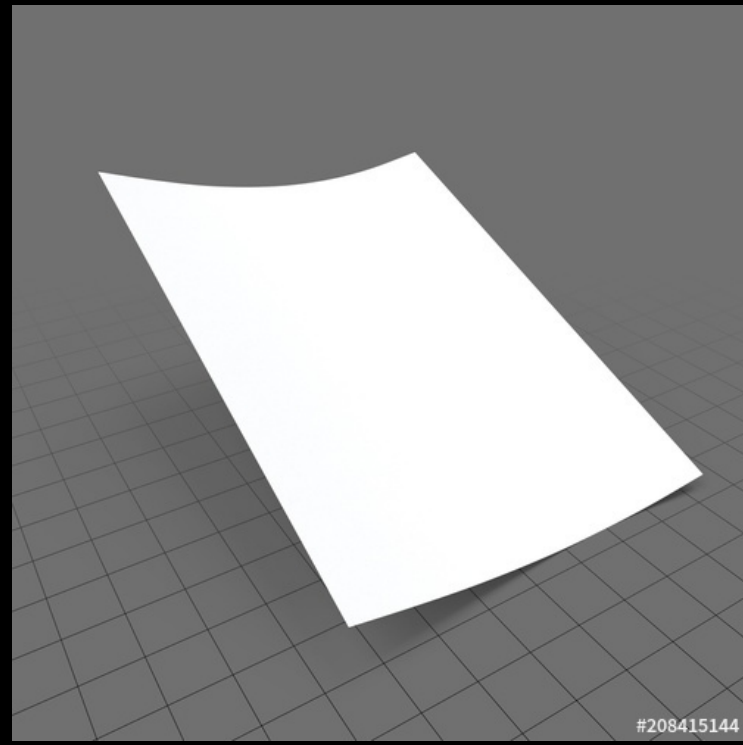


Repeat.





compass vs. map





Start with “who,”  
not “what” or “how”



CUSTOMERS

~~CUSTOMERS~~


~~CUSTOMERS~~  
CO-CREATORS





We need more hobbits!





# The Local Leader's Toolkit: A Strong Towns Response to Pandemic

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# Leaders and Managers

## **Leaders**

- Have followers and a constituency
- Responsibly break rules
- Encourage risk taking
- Sell a vision
- See opportunities

## **Managers**

- Have subordinates
- Administer guidelines
- Play it safe
- Sell a project
- See potential failure





Sandpoint, Idaho

# Oswego Renaissance Association





# Broad Avenue, Memphis

- 29 Property Build/Renovations
- 50% increase in rents
- 25 New Businesses
- \$15+ Million in New Investment





# Three Phases



FIRST 60 DAYS



2 TO 12 MONTHS



ONE YEAR AND  
BEYOND

# Shift in Thinking (first 60 days)

Step Up

Orient Horizontal, Not Vertical

Be a Voice of Unity

Seize the Moment

# Shift in Thinking (2 to 12 months)



Recovery will not mean restoration.



You must work towards community self-sufficiency, fully knowing you won't get all the way there.



There is a tradeoff between growth and stability.



## Mid-Term Response

- Waive Home Occupation Restrictions
- Legalize Neighborhood Essential Services
- Kickstart Entrepreneurs
- Legalize Housing Adaptations
- Make Quick and Lean Investments in Biking and Walking





## Mid-Term Response

- End Parking Requirements
- Start Growing Food
- Thicken Civic Infrastructure
- Begin Reorienting Bureaucracies
- Change How You Measure Success







Lower the Bar of Entry







Lower the Bar of Entry





Lower the Bar of Entry





Preparing for State/Federal “Assistance”



# Local Priorities for Infrastructure Stimulus

- Prioritize maintenance over new capacity.
- Prioritize below-ground infrastructure over above-ground.
- Prioritize neighborhoods that are more than 75 years old.



# Shift in Thinking (beyond one year)



Rely on little bets, not transformational projects.



Emphasize resiliency, not simply efficiency.



Design to adapt to feedback.



Use bottom-up action, not top-down systems.



Conduct as much of life as possible at a personal scale.



Always do the math.



# Long-Term Response

- Focus on your downtown and an ecosystem of neighborhoods.
- Focus on neighborhood compatibility and not simply use.
- Focus on expanding housing opportunities.
- Focus on transportation as a means, not an end.





# Long-Term Response

- Focus on economic development with a gardening mentality.
- Focus on leveraging public spaces.
- Focus on your people.
- Focus on reducing debts and liabilities.





[strongtowns.org/toolkit](https://strongtowns.org/toolkit)

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